

2016

Using Co-operative Inquiry to embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across all programmes offered by Plymouth Institute of Education (PloE)

Summers, D

<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/12570>

University of Plymouth

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PedRIO Research/ Teaching Fellowship Award Scheme: Final Report

Name of key contact (project leader): Dr Denise Summers

Department: Plymouth Institute of Education

Names of other staff involved: Roger Cutting, Valerie Huggins, Alun Morgan, Ciaran O'Sullivan, Paul Warwick, Wendy Miller

Title of project: Using Co-operative Inquiry to embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across all programmes offered by Plymouth Institute of Education (PIoE)

Type of project: Co-operative Inquiry

Keywords: ESD (Education for Sustainable Development); Co-operative Inquiry; pedagogical development; cross-programme; sustainability

Aims of project:

Our aim is to embed Education for Sustainable Development across all of our courses, ensuring that all students benefit from an education where social, economic and environmental sustainability is woven into the very fabric of their learning experience, thereby producing graduates who take this learning forward and embed it in their own teaching. To achieve this, the aims of the projects were:

- To embed elements of ESD in all PIoE programmes utilising a co-operative inquiry approach (Heron and Reason 2001)
- To critically evaluate co-operative inquiry (CI) as an effective mechanism for the implementation of ESD in HE.

Background/context to project: Plymouth University has an established core of excellence in the field of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), supported by Paul Warwick, the lead for the University's Centre for Sustainable Futures. In Plymouth Institute of Education the promotion of ESD was seen by many to be vital to the future development of our courses and although there were programmes that had effectively integrated ESD into modules, e.g. PCET, and others that focussed on ESD, e.g. MSc Sustainability, there were opportunities for development in other areas of our work.

Methods used: Co-operative inquiry

Results:

July 2015 Day at Embercombe: all staff from PIoE invited and over 30 attended. Initial scoping of current practice re ESD across the PIoE programmes contributing to the design of a new sustainability curriculum review tool by the Centre for Sustainable Futures.
Sept 2015 Weekend at Embercombe: 21 staff and 8 students participated.
Rowena Passey input on Prevent strategy
Jan Georgeson input on Sustainable Leadership

Robert Cook input on mindfulness

Paul Warwick input on the Sustainable Development Goals

Engaged in a range of group activities and agreed on the following cooperative inquiry groups:

- Pedagogic Principles of Sustainability (PPS)
- Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC)
- Social Justice and Sustainability (SJS)
- Embedding ESD in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) across the phases – potentially Early Years, Primary, Secondary, Further Education

Oct 2015- July 2016: Each group has met 4 times and the leads have then met as a group to share key points to feed back to the next meeting. Each group identified its own areas of research, set out a plan and identified actions. The members undertook cycles of action and reflection individually and collectively to promote transformations in practice and in thinking about ESD.

There have been a range of outcomes from the study:

In the PPS group, examples of pedagogic approaches that promoted aspects of ESD were critically discussed. Members of the group tried out creative activities that were inquiry-based and offered opportunities for team-work, collaboration, active participation, problem solving in real life contexts, promoting both futures and systemic thinking. This was underpinned by a critical literacy theoretical framework. These ideas will be shared more widely with tutors across PLoE programmes through pedagogy workshops in 2016-17.

The ITE group has developed a focus on well-being in the Primary ITE programmes, introduced ESD to secondary courses and researched students' opinions about embedding ESD into their own practice in schools and early years' settings.

The LOtC group focussed on developing the university grounds as a learning space, making explicit links with learning spaces in schools. They have linked with the Centre for Sustainable Futures and worked with staff at Freshlings Nursery to enhance the outdoor learning opportunities for the nursery children. This focus was largely driven by Early Years Education colleagues' desire to enhance the provision on-campus particularly for Freshling's Nursery.

The SJS group engaged in critical discussion on key themes in ESD and considered approaches to challenging mindsets and perspectives when working with students. Meeting across the academic year, discussions were on and around 6 identified topic areas and how they were defined generally and how they may be defined within learning settings.

Initial evaluation of CI as a method to promote change is mixed. It seems as though it has benefits as a departmental model for advancing sustainability education across the curriculum, as it provides a forum for critical discussion, reflection, action and evaluation of new ways of working, all in a safe space with permission for innovation and risk-taking. It

also offers a bottom up/students as partners/staff collaboration approach rather than a top down strategic imposition of change.

The challenge has been to engage significant numbers of students and staff outside of the core group of ESD 'champions' and so the drive for change still comes from a minority of passionate advocates. Competing demands on students and staff time meant that the engagement in the meetings was patchy and it was hard to sustain the momentum through the year. Easy to implement a practical change, such as outdoor play opportunities for the Nursery children, and provide evidence of its impact on learning. Not so easy to evidence the ways in which students thinking may have changed by engaging in ESD activities in their programme.

Associated publications (include details of intended/draft publications):

Dissemination:

Summers, D. & Huggins, V. 'Implementing and Evaluating Co-operative Inquiry to embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across the Institute', Fifth Pedrio Annual Conference, Plymouth University, 8th April 2016

O'Sullivan, C. and Morgan, A. (2016) 'Implementing and evaluating a method of Co-operative Inquiry to embed Education for Sustainable Development', Sustainability in Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities, Canterbury Christ Church University 6-7th July 2016